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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
Affizes held at G U I L D F O R D
For the County of S U R R E Y,
AUGUST 10. 1759.

BEFORE THE
Honourable Sir EDWARD CLIVE, Knight,
One of the Justices of His Majesty's Court of Common Pleas;

AND THE
Honourable Sir SYDNEY STAFFORD SMYTHE, Knt.
One of the Barons of his Majesty's Court of Exchequer.

Published at the unanimous Request of the HIGH SHERIFF,
and the GENTLEMEN of the GRAND JURY.

By **WILLIAM SELTON**,
Curate of St. James's, Clerkenwell; and Lecturer of St. Giles's in the Fields.

L O N D O N, Printed by J. HUGHES :
And sold by Messrs RIVINGTON and FLETCHER in *Pater-noster-row*.
[Price Six Pence.]

S E R M O N

TREACHED AT THE

Affizes held at GUILDFORD

For the County of SURREY

AUGUST 10. 1759.

BEFORE THE

Honourable Sir EDWARD CLIVE, Knight

One of the Justices of His Majesty's Court of Common Pleas;

AND THE

Honourable Sir SYDNEY STAFFORD SMYTHE, Knight

One of the Barons of His Majesty's Court of Exchequer.

Published at the unanimous Request of the High Sheriff,
and the GENTLEMEN of the GRAND JURY.



By WILLIAM SHELTON

Clerk of St. James's Church, and Lecturer of St. George's in the Fields.

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High Sheriff of the County of *Surrey*;

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Their most Obedient

Humble Servant,

WILLIAM SELLON.

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GENTLEMEN of the GRAND JURY.

THIS

S E R M O N

Published at their Request,

Is Dedicated by

Their most Obedient

Humble Servant,

WILLIAM BRILLON

DEUT. iv. 8.

*What Nation is there so great, that hath Statutes
and Judgments so Righteous, as all this Law,
which I set before you this day?*

WHEN we consider Mankind without Government and Laws; every one acting for himself; pursuing his own interest, separate from the rest of the world; destitute of any friendly assistance, and guarding himself against the fraud and violence of others; what a state of doubt and anxiety, of confusion and misery, is represented to our mind! A state, the apprehensions of which must shock every man, who is endued with social and benevolent affections, and who knows the tender feelings of kindred and friendship: since he would be thereby reduced to depend upon his own strength or subtlety for the necessaries of life; and could be no further safe, than the same Powers might defend and maintain them:——would be
exposed

Gen. xvi. 12.

exposed to continual danger, and see every thing, which might be dear to him, liable to be forced from him. All comforts and conveniences would be rendered quite precarious, and every one be in Ishmael's condition, having *his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him.*

This state of common uneasiness and danger, from which no one could free himself by his own power and defence, naturally directed men to form themselves into Societies: that by their joint strength they might procure and enjoy what every one experienced the want of in himself. Hereby, as by a kind of stipulation or agreement, they engaged to protect each other from injuries, and to secure the peaceable possession of their lives, properties, and liberties.

Thus the original cause of constituting a society was the defence and safety of private right; but other objects of attention soon arose from the very nature of society; such as the honour and advancement of the public, the cultivation of commerce, and improvement in learning and sciences, and all the

the useful and elegant arts of life. Thence it became necessary to form Laws; which are the greatest security against violence and oppression; and the only source and solid basis of public peace and prosperity. Every People or Nation, in order to have what may be esteemed as a Commonwealth, or Government, must establish some well-concerted plan of Polity; which by a just and prudent administration of affairs may protect the particular interest of every member, and promote the honour and happiness of the whole community.

The words of the text are intended to point out the peculiar excellence of that state, in which God had placed the Israelites; the fitness of their Judgments or Laws for the Security of their Civil rights and the advancement of their Political welfare; and the purity of their Statutes or Ecclesiastical precepts for the good order of His Church, and the suitable performance of His Worship.

But the expression may be with great reason and propriety applied to any other Government under such circumstances, as that of Israel: and especially
to

to that excellent form, with which we of this nation are blessed; who enjoy a complete system of laws, producing every social advantage and benefit; and who more immediately, by embracing the Gospel of Christ, have the Lord for our God.

It would be too extensive an undertaking for the present occasion to consider the reasons, upon which every particular Law hath been founded; and then to point out, how each of them hath yielded its proper effect in promoting the public welfare. And indeed some general observations upon the excellency of our Constitution will manifest the Righteousness of our Statutes and Judgments, and justify its title to that character, which Moses attributes to the Jewish Law: so that all, who shall hear our Statutes, must acknowledge *this great nation to be a wise and understanding people.*

Dent. iv. 6.

The Liberty, which all men of honesty and understanding approve, and which seems to have fixed its residence with us, is nicely poized upon a perfect balance: it is far from Slavery on the one hand, that

that miserable subjection to Arbitrary power, without any control or restraint; and equally distant on the other from that Confusion or Licentiousness which supposeth no legal establishment. It is not a freedom to gratify our inordinate passions, and to give a full scope to every desire and inclination in the heart: for a freedom without regard to reason and religion, would in effect be only a licence to make ourselves miserable. True Liberty is founded upon Laws, which are calculated for the general happiness: it declines and perishes by Licentiousness; and cannot be maintained without such good restrictions, to which it is desirable, that social and religious creatures should be subject, and without which we should be in a state of distraction and misery.

Again, As to our right and power of Property; it is an easy and safe possession of what is our own: we have the satisfaction of calling it so, we have the freedom of enjoying it, and an authority to claim and recover it from the most powerful invader. When there was no common Justice, and no legal redress of injuries; every possession was uncertain,

Micah iv. 4.

and labour almost vain and fruitless : but under our Government, founded in the most tender regard for the good of its subjects, *every one may sit secure under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree,* sheltered from the attacks of wicked men : our Laws are, as it were, a wall of defence about our dwellings, and free us from all dread and apprehension of encroachments.

Luke i. 74.

And further, It is an essential part of a wise and good Constitution to support and encourage the exercise of Religion : to protect men, that they may *serve God without fear* according to the dictates of their consciences ; and to provide a public direction and assistance for the improvement of their minds in the knowledge and practice of all virtue.

The exercise of Religion is necessary, as it recommends us to the favour of God, and engages the protection of the Almighty. It is generally observed, both in Sacred and Profane history, that the Prosperity or Adversity of Nations hath been answerable to the state of Religion amongst them. They flourished and were happy, while the people
were

were virtuous; but as these became degenerate and corrupt, They languished and declined, and sunk into contempt and dissolution. *Righteousness ex-* Prov. xiv. 34. *alteth a nation, but Sin is the reproach and ruin of any people.* God hath promised to honour and reward those, who are obedient to his commands; but withdraws his protection, as men fall from their duty, and at length avengeth Himself of the Nation, which worketh not righteousness. *The Lord* 2 Chron. xv. 2. *is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you.*

But the exercise of Religion is the necessary care of every Government, not only as it engages the favour and blessings of Divine Providence, but also with respect to the good effects, which are produced to the community by its immediate directions and commands, and by the power and influence which it hath upon the minds of men.

Thus in regard to the Ruling part of a Nation; the Christian Religion teaches Princes and Governors, to be *a terror, not to good works, but to the* Rom. xiii. 3.

Luke xxii. 25. *evil: Not to exercise authority, like the Gentiles; but*
 Rom. xiii. 4. *to be the ministers of God to their people for good;*
 v. 6. *and to attend continually upon this very thing. It*
 exhorts them to be careful of the prosperity of their
 subjects, and truly and indifferently to minister
 justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice,
 and to the maintenance of true religion and virtue.

And in regard to the People; It sets forth the
 necessity of subordination, and directs submission
 and obedience to them, who are in authority: it
 Rom. xiii. 7. *causes them to yield with chearfulness honour to whom*
honour, and tribute to whom tribute is due: it com-
 Acts xxiii. 5. *mands them not to despise dominion; nor to speak*
 Rom. xiii. 1. *evil of their rulers; but to be subject to the higher*
 v. 5. *powers, as ordained of God; and to obey not only*
for wrath (or through fear) but for conscience sake.
 Christianity tends to influence our conduct in every
 relation; inciting us to cultivate a spirit of universal
 love and beneficence; and prescribing all those du-
 ties and virtues, which inspire and improve *peace*
 Luke ii. 14. *upon earth, and good will* amongst men.

Human Laws may be formed with the utmost
 skill,

skill, and well calculated for the general good of society: but Religion alone can secure the ends intended by them. The assurance of secrecy in the breach of them, or the expectation of evading their force upon a discovery, would open a way to all licentiousness; did not Religion check the conscience, and the hopes and fears of futurity overrule our present passions and interests. What security could there be of faith and trust; should only the immediate convenience or inconvenience be regarded? What authority and confirmation would there be in an Oath, which is indispensably requisite as *an end of strife*, and determination of controversy; did not the Supreme Being charge the mind, and men reverence that sacred name, by which they swear? Heb. vi. 16.

It is clear then, that Religion is necessary to the happiness of a governed society; and it is as clear, that That Constitution must be the most perfect and most happy, where the true and undefiled religion is professed. The value of our's therefore is greatly enhanced by the excellency of that Church, which is established amongst us.

The

The principles of our reformation are founded upon a serious and impartial inquiry into the doctrines of Christianity : and we esteem our Institution no further pleasing to God, than as it is a Reason-
 Luke xi. 52. able service. It doth not *take away the key of know-*
 Mat. xxiii. 13. *ledge*, and *shut up the kingdom of heaven against* men : it doth not contradict our senses, nor enjoin us to embrace absurdities : it doth not assume a dictatorial power over the understandings of mankind, and insist upon an implicit belief : but it asserts the right, and inculcates the duty and obligation upon every one to search the Scriptures. Thence we derive the rule and the authority of our Faith ; and thither we refer men for an honest examination of it : not doubting, but that the diligent and ingenuous inquirer will become a firm and zealous defender of it.

And in imitation of our blessed Lord and his Apostles, our Church endeavours to gain profelytes by those means of instruction and edification, which are consistent with the liberty and constitution of the mind of man. Let force and violence, cruelty and persecution, be the peculiar warfare of the Church
 of

of *Rome*: and while the scourge and the rack are their instruments of conversion, and men are tortured into their opinions; be it our method to open the Scriptures, and apply to their understandings:--- by reason and argument to prove the truth of our faith, and by meekness and love to shew the efficacy of it upon our minds; that, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we may *open the eyes of the* Acts xxvi. 18. ignorant; may *turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*

Thus our Government applies the best means to contribute to the peace and comfort, and to advance the true interest and dignity of the Commonwealth:---to do all possible good to the members of it; to consult their present prosperity and happiness, and to confer eternal salvation upon them. The interests of Church and State are happily united, and closely interwoven with each other; their directions and laws promote the same good end, the welfare of human nature; and mutually support and improve each other's advantage. They enjoin piety towards God; prescribing a strict observation of the Sabbath, as a day of rest, and a day of worship.

ship. They require the punctual performance of justice and faithfulness; and prohibit the gratification of any private desires, which may be prejudicial to others. They command men to fulfil all the social and relative duties of life; to be diligent in their honest callings; to exercise their several faculties and powers for the common good; and to contribute a proportionable part of their substance for the provision of the poor. All which directions are formed intirely for the benefit of the world; and have a manifest tendency to the security and happiness, of every man in particular, and of all men as united in society.

This is the nature and design of our Constitution, as derived from the holy Scriptures, and enforced by civil Laws. Such are the duties, incumbent on its members, as commanded by the State on penalty of immediate infliction, and inculcated in the Gospel by Eternal rewards and punishments.

If then it be any privilege to have a Government established upon just and equal principles; If it be
 John vi. 68. any favour and mercy to have *the words of eternal life*

life in our own hands, and to enjoy the liberty of worshipping God, as our consciences direct; If, in short, it be a blessing to have the means not only of our present peace and joy, but of everlasting felicity; how should we esteem and love the Constitution, which proposes and administers to us such inestimable benefits?—Especially when we consider also, that we have the highest expectation and confidence of the duration of these privileges, not only from the nature of our Constitution; but from the disposition of our Sovereign; who places his own glory and advantage in the happiness of his subjects, and the good estate of the public; and who prefers the government of a free people by their own laws, to absolute dominion and tyranny over a nation of slaves.

Let a right sense of these blessings excite us to render all honour and thanksgiving to our gracious God, who hath poured such benefits upon us; to meditate on his goodness and adore his glorious name for these testimonies of his love: and engage us to a hearty profession of the true faith, and a suitable practice, that we may appear not wholly un-

worthy of that long course of mercies, by which He hath distinguished us.

Let our hearts be filled also with a just value and esteem for our gracious Sovereign, by whose power and goodness the Righteousness of our Statutes and Judgments is preserved to us : that we may pay him all reverence, and discharge a chearful and conscientious obedience to his authority : that we may with all readiness answer the demands of his government against the common adversary, and contribute our utmost endeavours to promote his ease and dignity.

And let us resolutely adhere to our excellent Constitution : let our love and our zeal for it be proportionable to its real value : let us be faithful to its interests, and vigilant for its security and advancement ; and apply our joint and uniform labour to transmit it in a state of purity and perfection to posterity, that it may be the *joy of many generations*. Not that there appears any particular cause for anxiety and fear ; unless indeed from our ingratitude and wickedness, which may provoke God to remove
his

his Glory from us, and to withdraw those favours, which are our distinguishing honour and happiness. We have exerted ourselves with illustrious success in opposing the encroaching power of tyranny: we are blessed with wisdom and unity in our Councils, and experience their happy effects by conduct and courage in our Armies: we have great advantages from the peculiar nature of our situation, and from the numbers, strength, and disposition of our people. So that, under these auspicious circumstances, if we would act with sincerity, and exert a spirit and resolution becoming men, who profess themselves Freemen and Christians; we may reasonably hope, through the protection and favour of Heaven, to frustrate the most deep designs of our enemies, to defeat their most powerful attempts; and to prosper in our just and honourable undertakings.

And this Hope is more immediately confirmed and heightened to us, by the present great and important victory abroad; and by the seasonable assurances here of an universal and sincere concern for the common cause. Our people are inspired with public spirit and honest zeal, and with joint

hearts and hands become the military supporters of their own rights and properties: and men of the highest dignity are active and forward in the service of their Country, and prepared to sacrifice their substance and their lives in the defence of the best of Kings, and the most perfect Constitution.

The real danger to our Establishment arises from our internal disorders and corruptions; which are more to be dreaded than any hostilities. These lay us open to the power of our enemies, and to the judgments of God: they naturally tend to bring destruction upon the place, where they prevail; and also cry aloud to heaven for vengeance. Sin is indeed the source of every public evil: it hath corrupted and destroyed the most flourishing states, and spread ruin and desolation over kingdoms, which no foreign enemy could oppress. Men thereby sap and undermine the ground, upon which they stand; and break down their own support, and that of others about them: they subvert the very foundations of the building, and involve all things in one common ruin. It is absurd then to flatter ourselves with

with the hopes of safety, while men abound in all manner of wickedness, and are filling up the measure of their iniquity with greediness; while they *glory in their shame*, and despise all means of re-Phil. iii. 19. very. A Reformation of manners is absolutely necessary: a check must be given to immorality and impiety, and the overflowings of ungodliness be repelled and restrained. The peace and happiness of every particular person, the credit and honour of Religion, the welfare and prosperity of our Country, depend entirely upon it.

The Magistrates therefore are called to the discharge of their office; *to hear the causes, and judge* Deut. i. 16. *righteously between every man and his brother*: to reconcile contending and quarreling parties: to protect the properties of the honest, and prevent all violence and disorders: to use all diligence for the encouragement of virtue and the suppression of vice; and by all means to exercise their power and authority for the publick good.

Proclamations and Statutes will produce no benefit to society, unless they are put in force: in vain
should

should we boast of the goodness and excellency of our Laws, were they neglected and trampled on: and the disgrace of not having a just and regular execution of them would be greater, than not to have them at all. Fraud and Dishonesty, Immorality and Profaneness deserve no toleration; for no man can pretend conscience for these vices, and they are the very bane of the Government.

Indeed, to see those, who might have been useful members of the community, undergoing public marks of infamy; --- to see numbers of our fellow-creatures banished into foreign parts, and others cut off by the hand of Justice in a state of health, and perhaps in the vigour of life, cannot but affect us with pity and compassion. Yet, if men will have no regard to their own good, and their engagements to society; if they will neglect to provide for their own support by honest means, and will act against the civil rights of their neighbours by violence and rapine; they do what in them lies to destroy the Constitution; they forfeit all right of protection, and must be treated as publick enemies. How clear is their condemnation! how just their punishment!

ment! May such consider the nature of their crimes, and the aggravating circumstances which may have attended them: the sin of offending against such good and known Laws, and the conviction of their own minds; and the danger of provoking a just and almighty God! And may they be persuaded, while God gives them yet space for repentance, to fly to that City of Refuge; unto which our Blessed Saviour invites all sinners, with his arms, as it were, extended to embrace them: and where, through his merits and mediation, they may find the favour and mercy of God, and rest and comfort to their souls!

But the Constitution may be equally prejudiced by less notorious instances: there are many crimes, which may not fall under the notice of the Laws, which yet are highly offensive to God, and produce much disturbance and detriment to the publick. Whoever consults his own private interest and welfare in opposition to the prosperity of his neighbour; Whoever, in order to enrich or aggrandize himself, or to gratify any sensual passion, procures any injury, or prevents any good to others; he is guilty,

guilty, in proportion to his crime, as an open offender: he hath broken the bonds and engagements of society; and stands condemned by the law of reason and equity. And although he may by his fraud or secrecy avoid a publick punishment, or the infamy of common discourse; yet how will he escape the awful bar of our Lord and Judge, where all our actions, small and great, publick and private, will be exposed to view in the presence of men and angels; and according to their true nature and quality a just sentence be pronounced and executed upon us? Let such therefore look into the New Testament, the Law written with the finger of God: there they may read their doom; and what will be their inevitable destruction, unless they should break off their sins by repentance, and regulate their lives according to that holy word.

Let us all be influenced by these considerations and motives to consult the good of our neighbour in every part of our conduct; and to be sincerely obedient to those *Righteous Statutes and Judgments, which are set before us.* Let the purity of our faith reach beyond the mere profession and form of godliness,

liness, and restrain the impurity of the heart : and let us unite in a vigorous pursuit of such measures, which may make for our peace, and most effectually secure our Religion and Government.

Are we under engagements to society ; and bound by nature, by reason, and by Christianity, to study and promote the general good ? --- and shall we so far violate our duty, as to pay no regard to any but ourselves ? shall we confine our views to our own private desires and gratifications, and indulge a vicious selfishness, which is the spring of universal corruption and misery ? --- Are we so peculiarly happy, as to be ruled by laws, made by ourselves ; which manifestly tend to establish private peace and publick serenity ? and shall we be so weak and void of understanding, as to be ourselves the disturbers of our own happiness ? --- Hath God favoured us with many mercies and blessings ; hath He made us the peculiar care of his Providence ; and put it into our power to be a great and flourishing people ? and shall we not acknowledge our obligations to Him, and shew our gratitude in the most acceptable manner ; by the reformation of our lives, and a sincere obedience

dience to his will? and can we be too grateful to so good, so gracious a God?—Hath He often preserved our Liberties, and established the means of our happiness? hath He called us to the knowledge of his Gospel, opened the way of salvation, and invited us to walk in the light of his countenance? and shall we not take heed to our ways and to our doings; and demean ourselves, as a people saved by the Lord? and endeavour to live so soberly, righteously, and godly, that the possession of these great blessings may be certain and lasting to us; and that we may attain their high and glorious ends, peace and tranquility here, and heaven and happiness hereafter?

Let us then strive to be a virtuous and religious people: let us *cease to do evil, and learn to do well*: Isa. i. 16, 17. let us protect religion by our encouragement, and adorn it by our actions; and labour in our respective stations, by authority and example, as far as our influence may extend, to raise and improve a sense of it in others. Thus shall we express a just regard for the welfare of our fellow-creatures, and a true zeal for the honour and prosperity of our Country:

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